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# Review of: Portable Utopia: Glasgow and the United States 1820-1920 by Bernard Aspinwall

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Portable Utopia: Glasgow and the United States 1820-1920 by Bernard Aspinwall

Review by: David Smith

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receive their due. Bell's secondment to the Palestine administration in 1938 plunged him overnight into the cauldron of Arab-Jewish tensions, and led to a series of unusual, important, and often dangerous assignments in the Middle East. After overseeing the resuscitation of the Camel Gendarmerie in the Beersheba area, he undertook war service with the irregular Druze Legion in the Syrian campaign and spent two years helping to modernize Glubb's Arab Legion. There are tales of high adventure here, but alongside them are Bell's balanced and perceptive assessments of British policy in the region.

By 1945 Bell was back in the Sudan, where (except for a short spell in Cairo) he spent the next ten years in the "new atmosphere of independence" (p. 165), coming to terms with nationalist forces and preparing for the transfer of power. The combination of internal religious and party rivalries, Egyptian ambition, American pressure, and British timidity left the Sudan administration with no room for maneuver. However, Bell adds that the "excessive paternalism" (p. 208) of the earlier period, as well as an obsession with standards of efficiency, gave Britain a share in the blame for the creation of a north-south division and the slow pace of "Sudanisation."

The book ends with a chapter on Bell's role as Political Agent in Kuwait from 1955 to 1957, valuable especially for its insights into Arab reactions to the Suez crisis and the "disastrous" (p. 248) effects it had on Britain's standing. This is a colorful, often exciting life, viewed critically and in the context of broader events.

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Bernard Aspinwall. *Portable Utopia: Glasgow and the United States 1820-1920*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press; distributed by Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.. 1984. Pp. xviii, 363. \$35.25.

In one hundred and eighty-eight pages of text, Professor Aspinwall presents evidence that there was a considerable interchange of ideas between Glasgow and the United States between 1820 and 1920. Many American visitors to Glasgow used the city as a model of a self-confident democratic community which was willing to combat the corruption of industrialization by fostering Christian values and civic pride. These visitors, impressed by the Glaswegian urban experiment, returned home eager to incorporate their impressions into the forging of a new sense of national identity.

Aspinwall traces these transatlantic connections primarily by meticulously recording the visits to Glasgow made by reformers of both sexes from the United States. American revivalists, suffragists, abolitionists, temperance leaders, health fanatics, and progressives placed Glasgow on their itineraries. The discussion of their sojourns in Glasgow is often accompanied by superfluous anecdotal material and repetition, and lacks a carefully conceived methodological focus or chronological framework. The visitors are often followed into Scotland and England which tends to further

obscure the unique impact Glasgow had on their thinking. However, with the possible exception of Aspinwall's discussion of municipal socialism, it is difficult to see from his work the precise influence the city played in the wider development of movements and institutions in the United States. Aspinwall argues that the contact between the city and the United States was based on "a relationship of peoples rather than governmental institutions" (p. 185), but this admission limits the scope of his interpretation. British and American scholars who are interested in tracing the influence of ideas within the institutional framework of the churches, business organizations, education pressure groups, or local government will be disappointed by this account. Here, these connections between ideas and institutions are alluded to but never systematically developed over time.

The author also recounts activities of Glaswegian visitors and emigrants to America who, committed to hardwork and efficiency, brought a sense of moral purpose and educated respectability within a Calvinistic framework to the emerging urban society across the Atlantic. Glaswegian involvement in the retail and textile trades, in the schools and the universities, and in the wider culture are recorded but never subjected to any systematic analysis. The achievements of this important segment of the Scottish Diaspora are abandoned amidst a compilation of impressions and the eighty page biographical index of prominent Glaswegians in the United States which concludes the volume. There is no discussion of the complex social and economic structure or the changing political development of Victorian Glasgow which both produced these emigrants. Readers would want to consult S.G. Checkland, *The Upas Tree: Glasgow 1875-1981* (1982), and A. Gibb, *Glasgow: The Making of a City* (1983) for this necessary context. Moreover, Aspinwall's discussion of energetic civic duty and regulation does not include the impact of these ideas on the urban poor in either the United States or Glasgow itself. By concentrating on middle class political and moral authoritarianism, the author gives only passing attention to the radical tradition within the city. Even Aspinwall's visitors, who felt so much at home in the city, were disturbed by the squalor, poverty, and drunkenness, conditions which were not alleviated by the expansion of municipal services, or by attempts to stimulate self-help among the poor. This population in the east end of the city was subject to increased police surveillance after 1870 when more Glaswegians found themselves before the bailies in police courts. One might suggest that Barlinnie Prison, opened in 1882, provided as much evidence that Glasgow "existed and worked" (p. 165) as the tram service which Aspinwall rightly describes as the pride of the city and the object of admiration by visitors from America.

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Sydney and Olive Checkland. *Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832-1914*. (The New History of Scotland.) Baltimore, Md.: Edward Arnold. 1984. Pp. 218. \$13.95 paper.